



Testimony of

**Thomas Burns**

Vice-President New Haven Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 933

Appropriations Committee Hearing

March 3, 2015

***HB 6824 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue***

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Tom Burns and I am the Vice-President of the New Haven Federation of Teachers (NHFT), AFT Local 933. I have served as a public school educator for twenty-four years and in the New Haven public schools for the past nineteen years. Our reform movement in New Haven started in 2009 of which I was an integral part, having led negotiations and then serving as co-chair on numerous committees over the next 5 plus years.

I am well aware of the many budget issues on the table this year. I understand that you are in a difficult spot and I am empathetic to your position. The proposed cuts in HB 6824 to the safety net and higher education must weigh heavily on your minds. With that said, I am asking you to fully fund our public schools through the ECS funding mechanism. It has been brought to my attention that the New Haven Public Schools have been underfunded for the 2014-2015 school year by \$25.8 million. Would it be that the regular ECS funding mechanism were to be followed this would not be the case? I ask that going forward you choose to fully fund our towns based on the ECS formula. I believe that it would be irresponsible to fund new charter schools when our neighborhood schools are in need of an influx of cash. Our schools have been flat funded for the past several years and the ECS formula isn't even being used to determine town grant amounts. Therefore, we aren't funding based on enrollment, poverty, ELL and other factors that are part of the ECS formula. This is a time when we all have to be focused on making sure basic needs are met, not investing in new programs that we can't afford.

This past week the NHBOE made a difficult decision in tabling a proposed partnership with Achievement First to create a new charter school. The work of the NHFT and BOE in a collaborative fashion over the past five years has been exciting and fruitful. The TRUST that has been built between the various players downtown and those in the classroom is strong. Through this collaborative relationship we were able to agree on a resolution, for now. The relationship between the Charter School community and the Public School community has not been a good one. How do we change this so that we may work together for the betterment of all our various school communities and children?

HB 6003, An Act Concerning a Moratorium on New Charter Schools and a Review of Existing Charter Schools, could be a workable solution for these problems and for the challenging budget proposal before you. This bill would place a moratorium on the approval of new charter schools by the Commissioner of Education and require the Department of Education to conduct a review of existing charter schools for the purpose of replicating and implementing successful programs and models in the public schools across the state.

The original intent of charter schools was to serve as a “laboratory, an incubator of innovation” but instead they have become competitors to public schools. This must stop. We can no longer afford dual systems. We need to work together and support each other as we move forward. We need to develop TRUST as we did in New Haven. But how do we accomplish this? A start would be to halt the expansion of new charters for the next five years while we study their effectiveness in the overall big picture. This would give us time to end the competitive nature between us that has heretofore permeated the educational landscape and attempt to build a feeling of TRUST and collaboration as we move forward.

In closing I ask that you establish a moratorium on new charter schools and fully fund our towns based on the ECS formula. That \$25.8 million would go a long way in helping us with our mission to have all children reach their full potential. I can’t wait for the moment in time when charter schools and public schools become true partners. Thank you for your time and consideration.